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ABSTRACT

This report answers four questions posed by Congress concerning the polic recruit training program in the District of Columbia. Information was gathered at the policy academy and at police headquarters through records and interviews and by visits to the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies and to three police departments. The study's findings were as follows: (1) there have been changes in the police academy course of study and academic requirements, although the academy did not document the changes and the reasons for them; (2) although there was little documentation, it appears that at least five recruit termination recommendations were overturned by officials above the director of training level; (3) police academy instructors are selected through a formal selection process and receive both classroom and on-the-job training; and (4) a process exists for the police department to acquire accreditation for its training academy, and other avenues for the process may also be available. (KC)

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Fact Sheet for the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

May 1990

D.C. GOVERNMENT

Information on the Police Recruit Training Program

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May 24, 1990

The Honorable Dean A. Gallo
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on the District
of Columbia
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Gallo:

Your March 24, 1989, letter asked us for information concerning the District of Columbia's police recruit qualifications and training program. In an earlier report, we addressed four questions concerning the entry-level police examination, changes in recruit qualifications, and examination scoring.[1] On October 4, 1989, we briefed your office on the status of our work on the remaining questions. At that time, we agreed to provide you with a written report covering the questions discussed at that briefing.

This fact sheet addresses the remaining issues. The material in this report reflects the program's operations between August 1982 and early 1990.

In addition, we are providing the specific information you originally requested about changes made to and the results of the police entry-level qualification test administered by McCann Associates, Inc. The McCann test is the entry-level police examination used by the District of Columbia Office of Personnel for selecting potential recruits for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

Results in Brief

We addressed your specific questions as follows:

1. Have there been changes in the police academy course of study and academic requirements?

Frequent changes have occurred in the academy course of study and academic requirements, such as the number of hours of instruction and the number of examinations recruits are required to pass. Some of these changes have been documented, but we found that the academy did not

[1] D.C. Government: Interim Report on Changes in Police Qualifications (GAO/GGD-90-06FS, Oct. 3, 1989).

generally keep records accounting for all changes in recruit training and performance standards. (See app. I.)

2. How many recruit termination recommendations have been overturned by officials above the Director of Training level?

The absence of academy documentation regarding termination actions against recruits prevented us from independently determining the number of such actions disapproved by MPD officials above the Director of Training level. According to the former Director of Training, a termination recommendation can be disapproved by the Administrative Services Officer prior to any action by the Chief of Police. Former and current Administrative Services Officers said they had not rejected any academic termination recommendations. Academy officials and MPD records confirmed that in September 1988 the former Chief of Police disapproved five termination recommendations by the Director of Training. We were unable to determine the basis for the former Chief's decision because we could not find any documentation and he declined to discuss the rationale for his decision. (See app. II.)

3. How does the police academy select and train its instructors?

Academy instructors are selected through a formal selection process and receive both classroom and on-the-job training. The formal training consists of a 40-hour Instructor Developmental course. New instructors also observe more experienced instructors for 3 to 6 weeks prior to teaching. In addition academy officials are developing an instructor certification program. (See app. III.)

4. How could the Metropolitan Police Department proceed to acquire accreditation?

The five-phase accreditation process begins with a law enforcement agency's application to the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. Once declared eligible, the agency submits a profile questionnaire describing its organization and management. The agency then provides documentation confirming its compliance with accreditation standards, and the Commission does an on-site assessment to verify agency compliance. On the basis of the assessment team's report and recommendation, the Commission either awards or defers accreditation. Officials from accredited police departments we visited described many benefits to being accredited, including the containment

of liability insurance costs, improved management resulting from documenting all policies and procedures, and the deterrence of litigation against the departments. (See app. IV.)

Besides addressing your specific questions, we also compared the McCann tests across years, as administered to each group of applicants, to identify changes to the test questions since 1981. We identified six changes to the test from the original 1981 version to the present. We consider these changes minor in that they were made to correct spelling or to reword phrases for clarity. For example, "moustache" was changed to "mustache" and "assume not a one-way street" was changed to "assume is a two-way street."

More detailed information on each question is in appendixes I through IV. Specific information on McCann test results is presented in appendix V.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to (1) answer the questions concerning police recruit training, (2) describe the nature of changes to the McCann test, (3) provide information on how the MPD could proceed to obtain accreditation, and (4) provide statistics on the qualifications of recruits since 1982. As agreed with you, we focused on the period since August 19, 1982, because Title I of the District of Columbia Appropriations Act, 1989 (Public Law 100-462) requires that the District maintain police qualifications equal to those in effect at that date.

Most of our work was done at the MPD academy and at headquarters in Washington, D.C. To find any changes in the course of study and graduation requirements, we interviewed the training staff at the academy and reviewed course syllabi, grade sheets, and Recruit Officer Handbooks. We could not document all changes because personnel at the time of our review were not always aware of past changes, nor could academy personnel provide us with records of the changes.

To research the accreditation process, we visited the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., in Fairfax, Virginia, and three police departments— the Houston, Texas, Police Department; the Connecticut State Police Department; and the Glastonbury, Connecticut, Police Department. We selected the Connecticut departments because one is approximately the size of MPD while, in contrast, the other

is a very small department, and both were among the first to be accredited. We selected the Houston Police Department because it is approximately the same size as the MPD and is one of the two major city departments to have been accredited. At your request, we also visited the New Jersey State Police Training Academy.

To verify what changes were made to the McCann Examination ESV-100, we visited McCann Associates, Inc., in Langhorne, Pennsylvania. In the presence of the president of the company, we compared the original examination with each succeeding examination.

Our work was done between October 1989 and March 1990 using generally accepted government auditing standards.

Agency Comments and Our Analysis

In commenting on the draft report, the Chief of Police found that a number of our findings parallel his independent review of the recruit training program. He particularly agreed with our concern about the past lack of documentation in recruit training. He also listed a series of actions MPD has initiated to improve the recruit training program.

However, in regard to accreditation, the Chief said that while the report accurately outlines one way a municipal police agency might acquire accreditation, he emphasized that this is not the only way. He also set forth other initiatives he intends to pursue to improve the quality of MPD and its members including establishing a police officer standards and training certification program; establishing certification programs in specialized skills, such as recruit training instruction; giving college credit for completion of the recruit training program; improving entry-level standards; and improving the education level of current employees. These initiatives may prove beneficial to MPD operations if properly implemented. As agreed with the Subcommittee, the scope of our review was limited to describing the steps in the accreditation process and did not include identifying and doing a comparative evaluation of alternative methods. We did not intend to imply that accreditation is the only way that the quality of a police department can be improved.

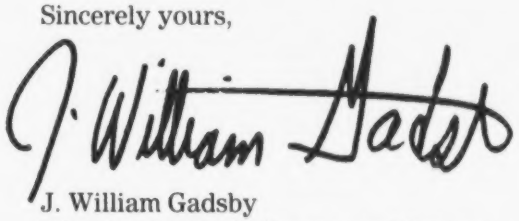
The Chief also said we had been incorrect when we said the official MPD position regarding the comprehensive final examinations for recruits is that they are not necessary. In the absence of a written policy statement providing the rationale for discontinuing the comprehensive examination, our statement was based on a November 21, 1989, letter to you in

which the Chief wrote that because of "refinements to our training program we believe that a comprehensive examination is not necessary." However, in commenting on the draft report, the Chief said that pending further evaluation, MPD has not determined whether these examinations are necessary. The District of Columbia's response is printed in appendix VI.

As arranged with the Subcommittee, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will make copies available to others upon request.

The major contributors to this fact sheet are listed in appendix VI. If you have any questions, please contact me on 275-8387.

Sincerely yours,



J. William Gadsby
Director, Federal Management Issues

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Abbreviations

CPR	cardiopulmonary resuscitation
MPD	Metropolitan Police Department

Have There Been Changes in the Police Academy Course of Study and Academic Requirements?

Frequent changes have occurred in the academy's course of study and performance standards since August 1982. The hours of instruction recruits receive have ranged from 294 to 880, and the subjects of classroom training, while seemingly consistent over time, have been reorganized continually. According to the Director of Training, additional changes have occurred in the number of examinations for academic subjects, the policies on comprehensive examinations, and the number of examination failures permitted prior to a recommendation for termination from the program.

According to the Director of Training, numerous changes in recruit training and performance standards have occurred, but MPD cannot fully document them. Key records needed to account for all changes and to provide the rationale for the changes have not been retained.

One academy official attributed the changes to changing Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) priorities, the broad discretion available to class instructors prior to early 1989 to modify the pace of instruction, the periodic interpretation of recruits' on-the-street training events, such as demonstrations, and the discretion the Director of Training—the top academy official—has to change the program.

The Current Recruit Training Program

The training program's objective is to provide recruit officers with the job-related knowledge and skills necessary for service in MPD. The course of instruction and the recruit performance standards applicable to a given class are communicated in a handbook and syllabus covering that class. The Recruit Officer Handbook communicates the policies and some general rules of MPD. The syllabus presents the course content of the recruit training program. These documents are subject to revision before each class by decisions made by the Director of Training in consultation with his top officers.

The current program duration is 653 hours and includes both specialized and academic classroom instruction. The specialized segment of recruit training covers blocks of instruction, such as physical training and self-defense, use of firearms and vehicles, and administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Recruits must physically demonstrate their proficiency in these areas.

The academic training covers such blocks of instruction as the D.C. Code; laws of arrest, search, and seizure; municipal regulations; handling property; and report writing. Recruits must demonstrate their

mental proficiency through 14 examinations. Recruits are expected to maintain a cumulative 70-percent average on the 14 tests, not fail more than 2 original tests, and not fail more than 1 remedial test for any original exam. Failure to meet these academic requirements may lead to a recommendation for termination from the Director of Training.

Changes in Recruit Training Are Not Fully Documented

The academy has not maintained the records necessary to account for all changes in the recruit training program since August 1982. A complete accounting would require a review of all course syllabi and recruit handbooks for each class. However, we were able to obtain only 7 syllabi and 4 handbooks for the 46 recruit classes held during this period. We found no handbooks or syllabi dated earlier than December 1985.

The academy also has long recognized the serious nature of its problems in documenting changes in recruit performance standards. In an April 16, 1985, memorandum through the then MPD Administrative Services Officer, the Director of Training at that time stated that:

"The Recruit Officer Training Program Academic Performance Standards employed by the Training Division since 1981 have unofficially changed with the printing of each Recruit Officer Handbook. The inconsistency with which we have employed such standards has led to operational confusion and places the department in an indefensible position should we be called upon to defend our practices."

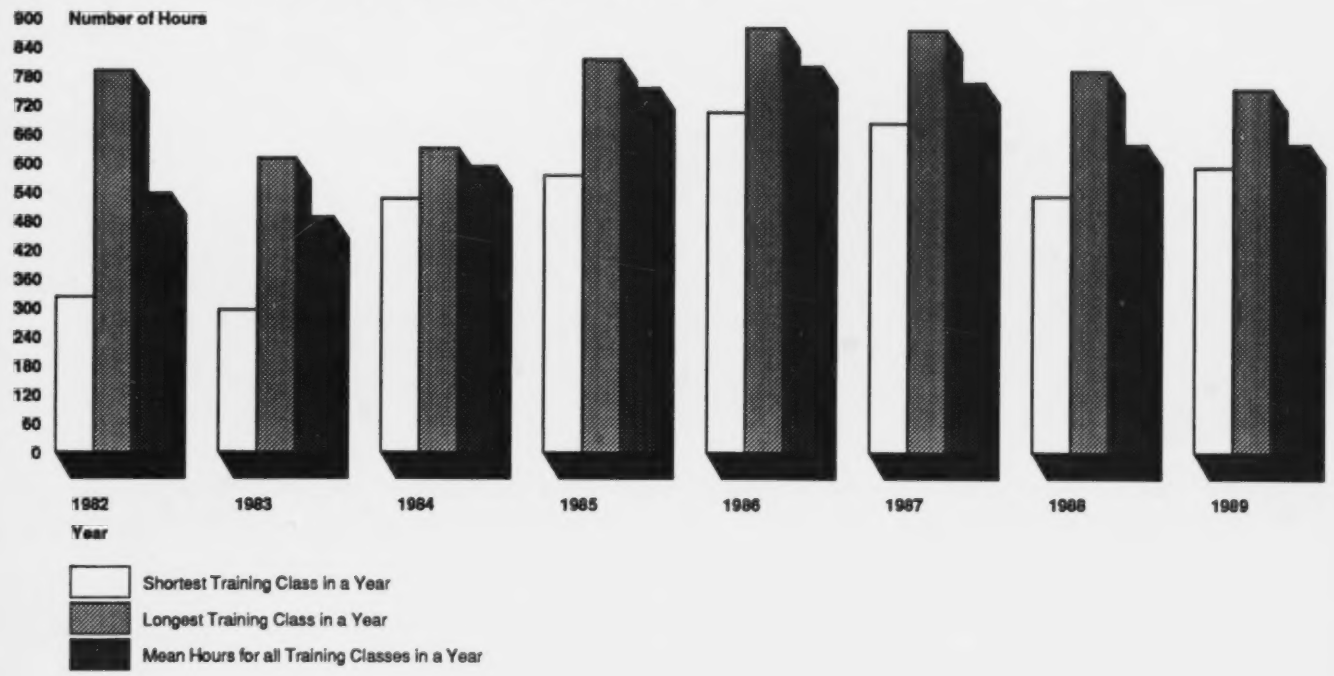
Because the academic performance standards in effect for each class were not always approved by the Chief of Police and thus made official, confusion over qualification requirements arose. For example, on April 16, 1985, the conflict between official and unofficial academic performance standards led the Director to conclude that he had no alternative but to graduate two recruit officers who had failed three examinations. These recruits would have been recommended for termination under the unofficial standards in effect for their class, but they were within the official standard of four failures, which had not been changed since 1981.

Despite the lack of complete records of changes in the academy program, we used available records and discussions with the former Director to develop information describing the nature of the changes in the recruit training program.

Hours of Instruction Have Changed

Information provided by MPD based on weekly classroom schedules maintained by the academy shows continual fluctuation in the hours of instruction recruits received. They ranged from 294 to 880, as shown in figure I.1. However, we could find little documentation to explain the changes. The Chief of Police said in written comments that the hours of instruction ranged as high as 960 hours (24 weeks).

Figure I.1: Hours of Instruction for Police Academy Recruits, 1982-89



Note: Four to eight training classes occurred each year varying in the number of instruction hours per class.

We did find documentation for a portion of one recent reduction in the instructional hours in the training program. Between July 16, 1987, and March 22, 1988, 224 instructional hours were eliminated (from 817 to 593). The elimination of on-duty remedial training and field trips to the D.C. Corporation Counsel Office, U.S. Attorney, and D.C. City Council

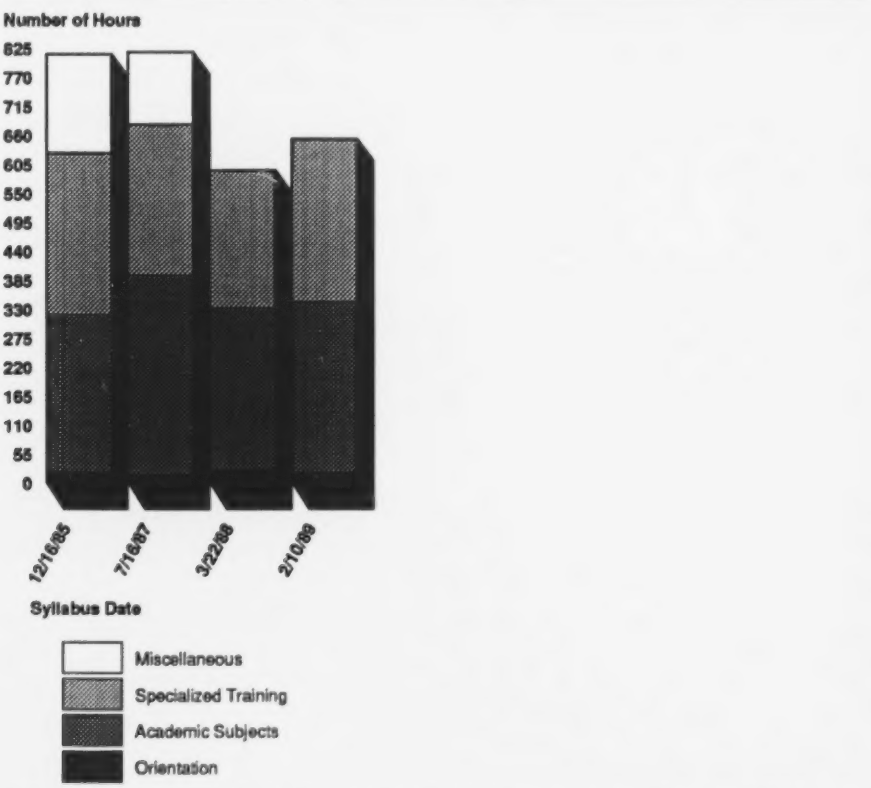
led to a reduction of 138 hours. These changes occurred because informal recruit feedback indicated they were not useful. Another nine classroom hours were eliminated by making the recruit responsible for covering some subjects, such as metropolitan transit police and tow crane operations, in home study. Home study subjects were still subject to testing.

To obtain a more detailed understanding of changes in the recruit course of study, we compared the syllabi for four recruit classes from December 16, 1985, to February 10, 1989. Our comparison showed that the number of hours devoted to academic and specialized training varied among recruit classes. (See fig. I.2.)

Academy officials offered their opinion that the changes in the instructional hours represented no substantive change in recruit training. While our review of the four syllabi showed a general consistency in the subject titles covered, we were unable to determine whether the content of the courses, as indicated by the subject titles, represented a substantive change in recruit training.

The frequency of changes in the course presentation and hours devoted to over 100 courses of instruction make any definitive comparison between classes difficult. For example, a course entitled "Preliminary Investigation Skills Lab" did not appear on the December 16, 1985, syllabus but was allotted 24 hours in the July 1987 syllabus and 12 hours in the March 1988 and February 1989 syllabi.

Figure I.2: Number of Hours of Police Academy Training by Type of Instruction



Note 1:"Orientation" consists of subjects such as 'Personal Appearance' and 'Overview of DC Government' and City Geography.

Note 2:"Academic subjects" consist of subjects such as 'Rules of Evidence' and 'Affidavits and Warrants'.

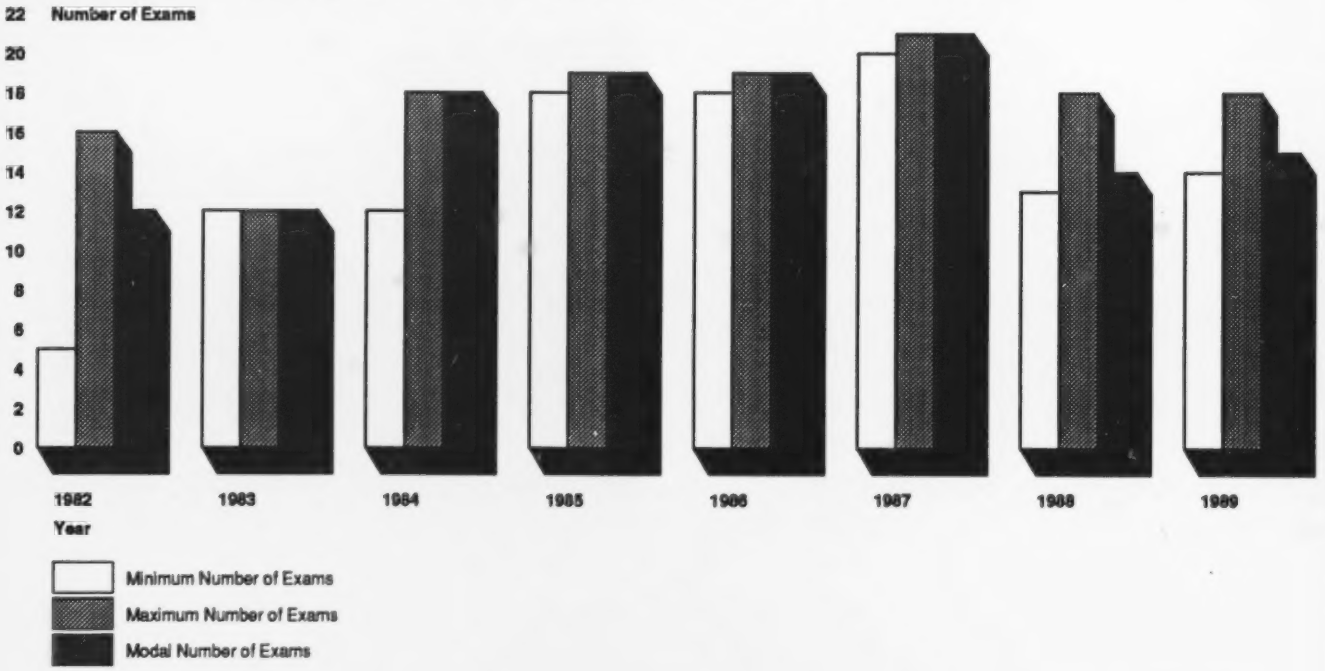
Note 3:"Specialized training" consists of subjects as 'Firearms Training' and 'CPR Training'.

Note 4:"Miscellaneous" consists of field trips to places such as Police Headquarters and D.C. Superior Court.

Recruit Examination Requirements Have Changed

The number of examinations administered to cover classroom instruction has changed greatly over time. From 1982 through 1989 the number has ranged from 5 to 21. (See fig. I.3.)

Figure I.3: Minimum, Maximum, and Modal Number of Examinations for Training Cycles, 1982-89

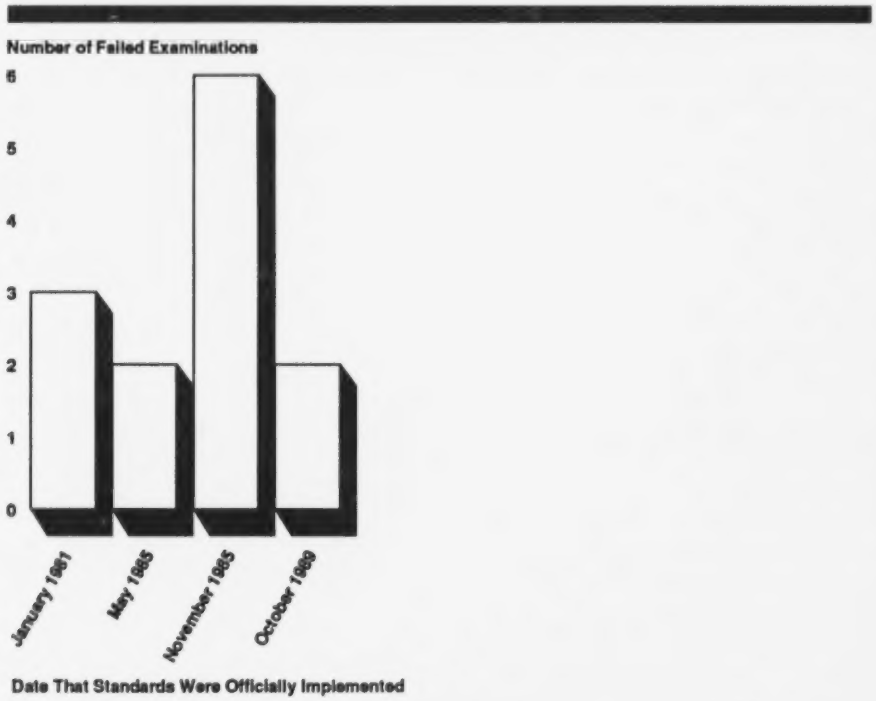


Note 1: Data on number of examinations were not available for all training cycles in 1982, 1983, and 1984. Data were available for only one training cycle in 1983.

Note 2: The modal number of examinations is the most frequently occurring number of exams in a given year.

As the number of examinations changed, so did the number of examination failures permitted before recommending termination. Before May 1989, the academy examination requirements included an examination at the conclusion of each unit of study, for example "D.C. Code," and remedial examinations for each examination failed. However, the academy has consistently placed limits on the number of permitted failures of both original and remedial examinations. Since 1982, from two to six examination failures—including remedial examinations—have been grounds for recommending termination. These variations are presented in figure I.4.

Figure I.4: Number of Examination Failures That May Result in a Recommendation of Termination From the Police Academy



Note 1: The January 1981 and October 1989 standards refer to original examinations only.

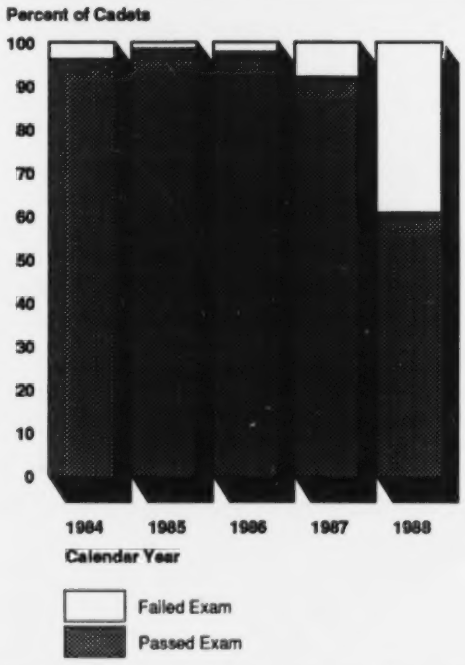
Note 2: The May 1985 and November 1985 standards include both original examinations and remedial examinations.

Since August 1982, the academy also has followed different practices regarding the use of comprehensive examinations at the end of the recruit class. Comprehensive examinations were intended to measure what the recruit retained from the academic program. According to the Director of Training, the comprehensive examination was introduced, on a trial basis, in 1984. From September 1985 through March 1988, comprehensive examinations were administered to recruits and counted toward their academic records. The former Director discontinued the use of the comprehensive examination in October 1988.

We found no written policy statement providing the rationale for discontinuing the comprehensive examination. We did, however, find a November 1989 letter signed by the Chief of Police stating that a comprehensive examination was not necessary in light of efforts to

shorten the recruits program and integrate various subjects to give students a more systematic approach to training. Subsequently, in commenting on our draft report, the Chief of Police said that pending further evaluation, MPD has not determined whether these examinations are necessary. Our analysis of recruit performance on the comprehensive examination showed that a much larger percentage of recruits failed the test in their first attempt in 1988 (39 percent) than in prior years. (See fig. 1.5.)

Figure I.5: Percentage of Police Academy Recruits Passing and Failing the Comprehensive Examination on the First Attempt



Note 1: The comprehensive examination was initially given to recruits in 1984.

Note 2: The comprehensive examination was last administered to recruits of training cycle 2 in 1988.

Explanation for Changes in Recruit Training

In the absence of academy documentation for changes in the recruit training program, the former Director of Training offered an explanation of the factors that influence the program. He said the course of study is subject to continual change to encompass such routine events as revisions in the D.C. Code and new court decisions. Changes also arise from suggestions from the academy staff on how best to present subject matter.

In addition, the former Director offered four other reasons for changes since 1982. These were (1) changing priorities within the MPD; (2) the decentralized instructional system in place from 1981 until March 1989, which gave considerable discretion to class instructors to modify the pace of instruction; (3) the need to use recruits to respond to external events, such as demonstrations; and (4) the discretion of the Director to make changes.

The history of changes in the recruit course of instruction is an example of how changing priorities influence the course of study. According to the former Director of Training, the Chief of Police desired to get officers on the street as quickly as possible to respond to crime emergencies. In response, the former Director initiated a review of the recruit curriculum shortly after assuming command in January 1988. The review objective was to eliminate material not essential to preparing recruits to serve as police officers. As a result, recruit training was reduced by 226 hours. Such activities as field trips and classroom remedial training time were eliminated and home study was emphasized.

The second factor contributing to the changes was the decentralized teaching method employed by the academy from February 1981 until March 1989. During this period, a sergeant and two officers were responsible for guiding a class through the academy, including teaching all academic subject matter. The Director said that the instructors had considerable discretion in the pace they set in moving recruits through the academy. For example, the pace at which certain subject matter was taught could be affected by both instructor familiarity with the topic and ability of the class to master the subject.

A third factor affecting the hours of class instruction was the requirement that recruits respond to external events. Academy recruits are used as a reserve to help deal with a wide range of events, such as demonstrations, crime emergencies, or needs for security during visits by dignitaries. Time spent in such efforts is considered practical training and is recorded in the total number of hours of instruction.

Finally, the Director has discretion to initiate change in the recruit training program. For example, the former Director recommended discontinuing the comprehensive examination and modifying the teaching approach. After a review of the academy's teaching methods, the former Director also instituted a team-teaching approach. Since March 1989, instructors specialize in certain subjects, such as the D.C. Code or criminal procedure. The objective is to ensure greater mastery of the subject

matter by the instructor than was possible when the sergeant and two officers were responsible for teaching all academic subjects. The new teaching approach is also intended to reduce the variation in how subjects are presented to classes and how long the presentations take. As part of this effort, the former Director established a schedule for completing recruit training.

The former Director received formal approval by the Chief of Police for the various major changes he initiated in the recruit course of study. The former Director added, however, that such approval has not always been obtained, as indicated by the concerns raised in 1985 by the then Director of Training about the absence of Chief of Police approval of some academic standards.

How Many Recruit Termination Recommendations Have Been Overturned by Officials Above the Director of Training Level?

Before September 1988, the academy generally did not maintain records in its personnel files of proposed or actual adverse actions against recruits. However, through discussions with academy officials and a review of the correspondence files at the MPD, we learned that the Chief of Police disapproved five recommendations for termination in September 1988. A recruit can be recommended for immediate termination from the academy for such actions as academic failure; any act of dishonesty, such as theft, making false statements to or for the use of a superior officer, or cheating on any examination; and the illicit or unprescribed use of a narcotic or dangerous drug. Instructors initiate recommendations for termination. The recommendations then proceed through the Director of Training to the Chief of Police, who makes the final decision on whether to accept the recommendation.

Limited Documentation Exists on Termination Actions

According to the Director of Training, the academy does not have a written policy on what documentation must be retained on each recruit's training experience. According to the Director of Training, the academy practice before September 1988 was not to maintain records on adverse actions against recruits. A recruit faced with a recommendation for termination was allowed to resign without a record being kept in the file of the reason for the resignation. Further, the academy kept no records on disciplinary actions, test results, or records of tutoring at the academy after each recruit graduated or resigned the academy. The former Director said that the rationale for this was to give the terminated recruit a fresh start. However, the former Director said that the academy policy has been to retain all recruit training documentation since January 1989 so that there will be a clear audit trail.

MPD Reports Five Termination Recommendations Were Overturned

Because of limited documentation, we formally requested the MPD to report to us on the number of recruit termination actions disapproved by the Chief of Police since August 1982. We focused our inquiry on actions by the Chief because the Director of Training said the former and current Administrative Services Officers have not rejected any termination recommendations. The former Director, in a letter dated July 20, 1989, reported that the former Chief of Police disapproved five termination recommendations for academic failure made by the former Director in September 1988. The letter stated no rationale for the Chief's action. We contacted the former Chief, but he declined to discuss his rationale.

We reviewed the personnel files of the five recruits and determined that the recommendations for termination were based upon failure to meet academic standards. The recruits recommended for termination were retested in areas they had failed, passed the remedial tests, graduated from the academy, completed their probationary period, and are now serving as certified MPD officers.

How Does the Police Academy Select and Train Its Instructors?

Since April 1988, the MPD has used a formal review process to select instructors in which applicants are screened on a variety of factors. After being selected, new instructors receive both formal and on-the-job training. The formal training consists of a 40-hour Instructor Developmental course. New instructors also observe more experienced instructors for 3 to 6 weeks prior to teaching. In addition, academy officials are developing an instructor certification program.

Instructor Selection

The former Director of Training began using a new process in April 1988 to select instructors for the police academy. According to the former Director of Training, the new process arose from the former Chief of Police's concern about the lack of a formal instructor selection process at a time when more instructors were needed to train up to 250 recruits at a time. Records were not available to document, nor could MPD officials tell us, what formal selection procedures were used before April 1988.

The current selection process begins with the posting of a vacancy announcement for instructors. Applicants are required to submit a written lesson plan on a predetermined topic; give a 10-minute oral presentation; and answer 10 general questions about their police careers, personal interests, and reasons for seeking an instructor position.

The current process calls for a selection committee chosen by the Director of Training to rank applicants on such dimensions as their ability to determine training needs and to plan and prepare courses and/or blocks of instruction to meet those needs; and their ability to conduct research, evaluate information, formulate valid and objective conclusions, and present findings in an organized and effective manner. However, the Director of the academy can also independently conduct interviews and select applicants.

Instructors were selected from two vacancy announcements in April 1988. Selections were by a committee for the first announcement, and the Director independently selected for the second vacancy announcement. All instructors were detailed to the academy rather than permanently assigned because this approach facilitates reassigning instructors if they do not perform well.

Recruit instructors are required to have 3 years' service on the force. The police department profile data on the 55 instructors assigned to the academy in September 1989 show that 71 percent received at least some

higher education, and 78 percent had more than 10 years' experience with the MPD. Figures III.1 and III.2 show instructor profile data.

Figure III.1: Educational Attainment of Instructors Assigned to the Academy as of September 1989

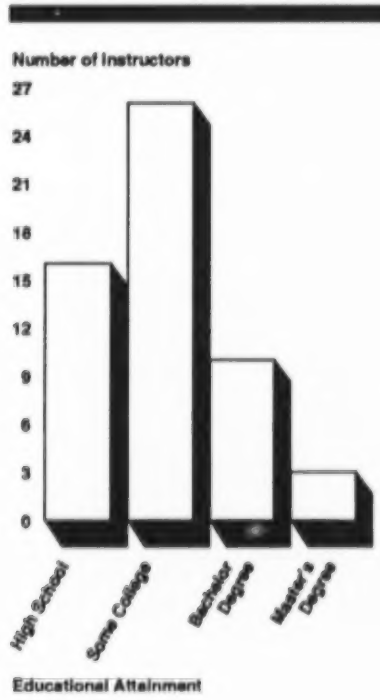
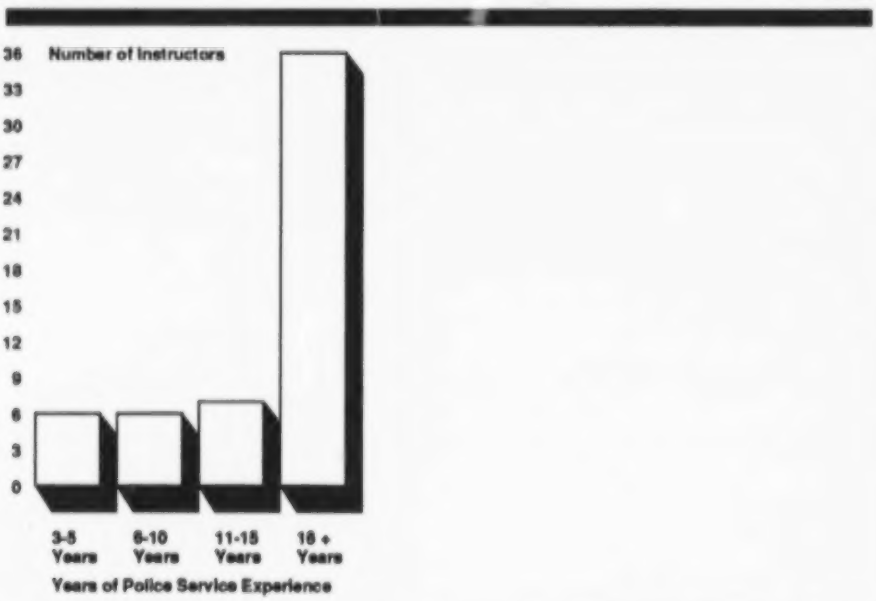


Figure III.2: Years of Police Experience of Instructors Assigned to the Academy as of September 1989



Instructor Training

Instructors receive both formal and on-the-job training. Formal training consists of a 40-hour course on impromptu presentation, communication, principles of learning, training needs assessment, behavioral task analysis, and instructional objectives. New instructors will usually spend 3 to 6 weeks at the academy preparing to teach a class. This includes observing experienced instructors present course material. The former Director said that the last four new instructors also were tested on the material they were to teach to demonstrate that they had mastered it.

Instructor performance is evaluated periodically through observation by a management team composed of the Deputy Director, the Assistant Chief of Police, and four lieutenants, or by any one member of the team. After such observation, the instructor is counseled on his/her performance. Failure to improve any deficiencies could lead to reassignment.

Instructor Certification

According to the former Director of Training, the academy is developing a certification program for instructors in conjunction with the University of the District of Columbia. Plans are nearing completion for a program for certifying physical training instructors. Plans for the

certification program for academic instructors include six seminars dealing with such topics as teaching adults, testing and evaluation, research, and curriculum development.

How Could the Metropolitan Police Department Proceed to Acquire Accreditation?

Accreditation is a certification granted to law enforcement agencies at the state and local levels that have demonstrated voluntarily that they meet professional standards. The process necessary to acquire accreditation is undertaken under the auspices of the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. The Commission was formed in 1979 through the combined efforts of four major law enforcement membership associations. These associations are the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, National Sheriffs' Association, and the Police Executive Research Forum. In the accreditation process, an agency is judged against a set of law enforcement standards in such areas as law enforcement roles, responsibilities, and relationships; organization, management, and administration; the personnel structure and processes; and law enforcement operations.

The Accreditation Process

Accreditation involves five phases, which can take about 5 years to complete depending on the size and condition of the agency. The accreditation phases are listed in table IV.1.

Table IV.1: Phases of Police Department Accreditation

Phase	Activity
I	Application
II	Agency profile questionnaire
III	Agency self-assessment
IV	Commission's on-site assessment
V	Commission grants or defers full accreditation

According to the Commission guidance in Standards For Law Enforcement Agencies: The Standards Manual of the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program, the accreditation process begins with an application to the Commission from the law enforcement agency's chief executive officer and from the agency's chief civil authority, where required by local laws or policies. The Commission determines from the application whether the agency meets eligibility standards. Eligible law enforcement agencies are defined as (1) legal government entities that are responsible for enforcing laws and have personnel with general or special law enforcement powers and (2) agencies providing law enforcement services whose eligibility is verified by the Commission. Once eligibility has been established, the agency and the Commission sign an accreditation agreement that identifies what is expected of each party.

During phase II, the agency completes an agency profile questionnaire providing information about its size, responsibilities, functions, organization, and management. This information helps the Commission decide which standards are applicable to the agency.

Phase III is the agency's self-assessment process in which it is to describe how it complies with all applicable accreditation standards. The agency is to assemble documentation to show its compliance with the standards and to facilitate the Commission's on-site assessment. The Commission estimates that it takes an agency from 12 to 18 months to complete the self-assessment phase.

Phase IV is the Commission's on-site assessment, which begins after the agency notifies the Commission that it complies with all applicable standards. This assessment determines whether the agency complies with all applicable standards. To conduct the assessment the Commission assembles a team of assessors, to the extent possible drawing officers from police agencies of similar size and type to the agency under review. To avoid potential conflict of interest, individuals are not to be assigned to assessment teams within their own states, and the agency under review is permitted to review the team make-up and can object to including certain individuals.

In phase V, the assessment team is required to submit a report to the Commission and the Commission is to grant or defer full accreditation. If the Commission defers accreditation, it provides the agency an outline of the steps necessary to correct deficiencies and gain full accreditation. During this period, the agency reverts to the self-assessment phase until it again complies with applicable standards. The Commission encourages the agency to correct deficiencies as rapidly as possible. When the agency reports that it has corrected the deficiencies, it is to be reinspected in the deficient areas. At any point in the accreditation process, the agency can question any decisions by the Commission, its staff, and its assessors.

Accreditation is granted for 5 years. To maintain accreditation, agencies must remain in compliance with the standards under which accreditation was granted. Agencies must apply for reaccreditation before the end of the fifth year. An on-site assessment is required as part of the reaccreditation process. The reaccreditation review focuses on how policies are implemented, in contrast with the initial review, which focuses on whether the formal procedures exist.

Police Agency Experience With Accreditation

To get some practical perspectives on the accreditation process, we visited three accredited police departments: the Houston Police Department; the Connecticut State Police Department; and the Glastonbury, Connecticut, Police Department. Officials from all three departments were positive about the value of accreditation. Benefits they cited included deterrence of litigation against the police departments, the containment of liability insurance costs, and improved department management resulting from documentation of all policies and procedures.

According to each department, a potential problem was that the Commission might impose arbitrary standards that were not appropriate for their jurisdictions. However, experience had shown that this was not a problem. The Commission permitted each department flexibility to identify standards applicable to their jurisdiction and to request a waiver of the inappropriate standards.

Department officials could not think of a current viable option to accreditation as a recognized symbol of the quality of a police organization. However, all said that they were looking at state accreditation as an option for the future. The attraction of state accreditation is the expectation that the state, rather than the local government, would pay for the costs.

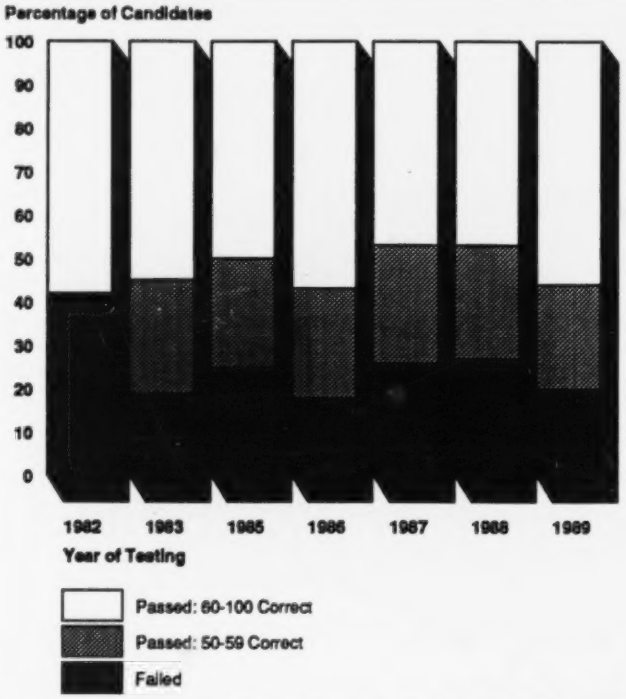
Have There Been Additional Changes in the Qualifications of Police Candidates Since 1982?

Since we issued our earlier report,[1] we have developed additional information you requested concerning the qualifications of police candidates since 1982. The new information includes the

- percentage of candidates who passed and failed the McCann test (see fig. V.1);
- number of candidates by race who passed/failed the McCann test since 1982 (see fig. V.2);
- number of candidates by sex who passed the McCann test since 1982 (see fig. V.3); and
- percentage of recruits graduating and not graduating, by year, from the academy (see fig. V.4).

[1] D.C. Government: Interim Report on Changes in Police Qualifications (GAO/GGD-90-06FS, Oct. 3, 1989).

Figure V.1: Percentage of Candidates Who Passed and Failed the McCann Test

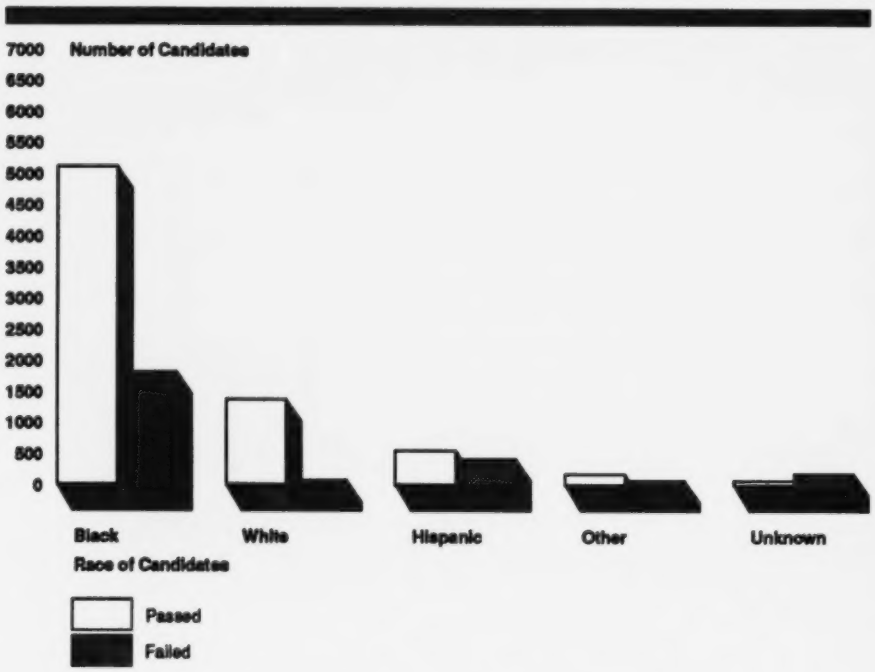


Note 1: The passing score for the McCann Test administered in 1982 was 60 correct out of 100. Data are unavailable for how many of those who had scores below 60 (failed) scored between 50-59.

Note 2: The McCann Test was not administered in 1984.

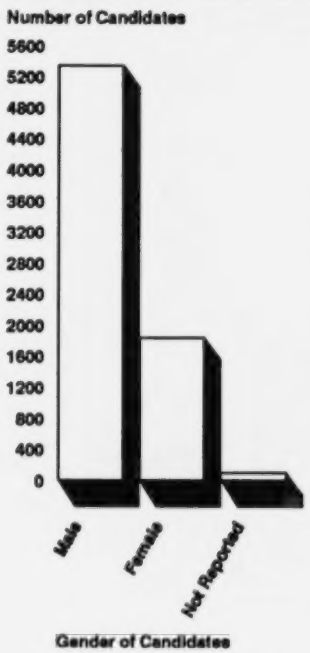
Note 3: The passing score for the McCann Test was changed to 50 out of 100 beginning with the first examination in 1983.

Figure V.2: Number of Candidates by Race Who Passed/Failed the McCann Test Since 1982



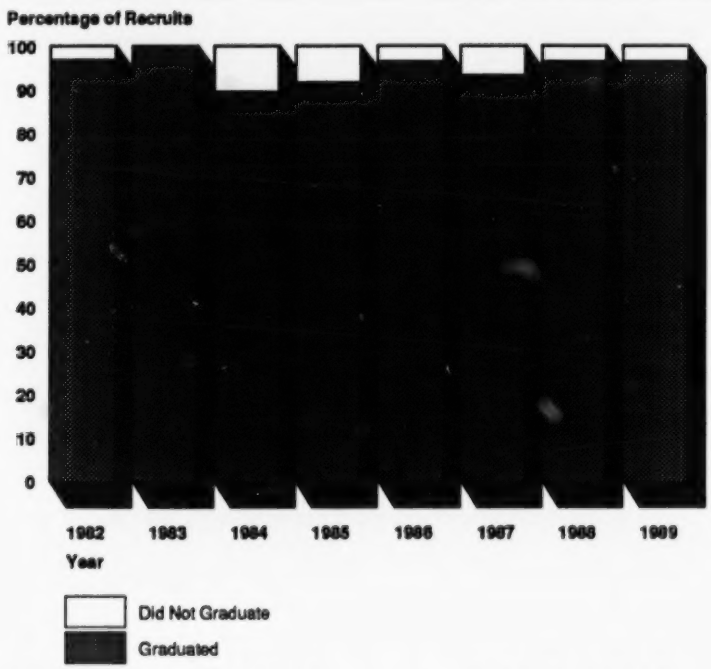
Note: Candidates who left the "Race" question blank are listed as "Unknown."

Figure V.3: Number of Candidates by Sex Who Passed the McCann Test Since 1982



Note: Candidates who left the "Gender" question blank are listed as "Not Reported."

Figure V.4: Percentage of Recruits Graduating/Not Graduating by Year



Note 1: Data were not available for all training cycles in 1982, 1983, and 1984. Data were available for only one training cycle in 1983.

Note 2: "Did not graduate" includes those who resigned from the academy, were terminated for academic failure or disciplinary reasons, or for any other reason did not finish the training cycle.

Agency Comments

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

OFFICE OF THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR
DEPUTY MAYOR FOR OPERATIONS

CAROL B. THOMPSON
CITY ADMINISTRATOR
DEPUTY MAYOR FOR OPERATIONS
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

MAY 16 1990

Richard L. Fogel
Assistant Comptroller General
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street, NW Rm. 3860
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

In reply to your letter dated April 11, 1990, please find enclosed the comments of the District government to your draft report titled, "DC Government: Information on the Police Recruit Training Program". Please direct further inquiries regarding this matter to Marc D. Loud of my staff at 727-6053.

Sincerely,

for Robert Bobb

Carol B. Thompson
City Administrator/Deputy Mayor
for Operations

D.C. 44
February 1988

Memorandum

Government of the District of Columbia
Metropolitan Police Department

TO: Mayor Marion Barry, Jr.

Department, Agency, Office: Office of the Chief of Police

THRU: Carol B. Thompson
City Administrator/Deputy Mayor
for Operations

FROM: Chief of Police

Date: MAY 4 1990

SUBJECT: Comments Concerning the U.S. General Accounting Office Draft Report on the Police Recruit Training Program

The following are my comments concerning the draft report on the Police Recruit Training Program prepared by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) for the U.S. House of Representative's Subcommittee on the District of Columbia.

While I take exception to several of the specific comments made by GAO concerning our Police Recruit Training Program, as outlined in my comments, a number of their findings parallel my independent review of this program. I particularly agree with the GAO concern about the past lack of documentation in recruit training.

APPENDIX I: Have there been changes in the Police Academy course of study and academic requirements?

There have been a number of changes and improvements in the Police Academy course of study and academic requirements since August 1982.

According to the charts provided by GAO, there were periods in 1982 and 1983 when recruit training classes received minimum periods of training near the 294 hour range cited in the report as the minimum training during the period. Since that time, however, minimum training periods have significantly increased. The Police Academy currently provides 654 hours (a little over 16 weeks) of recruit training to new officers. This training cycle is down from its previous high of 960 hours (24 weeks). This was accomplished by eliminating non-essential training and three weeks of "administrative duties" from the curriculum.

As might be expected, changes in the recruit training curriculum have tracked changes in the service demands on the department, laws and regulations, and court decisions. Additionally, the department has made fundamental changes in the way in which recruit officers are trained. As is noted in the GAO report, the decentralized instructional system in place until March 1989 was replaced with a "team teaching" system. Among other benefits, this change significantly reduced individual instructor discretion in course content.

GAO reported that the department has long recognized the serious nature of its problems in documenting changes in recruit performance standards. While the department has made improvements in recent years, more work remains to be done in this area.

Several issues concerning the number of examinations administered to recruit officer classes were discussed in GAO's report.

As might be expected, as the hours of instruction increased (or decreased), so did the number of examinations administered to recruit officers. Additionally, as the number of examinations changed, so did the number of examination failures permitted before recommending termination. Except for problems associated with documentation, none of this is remarkable.

Concerning the issue of a comprehensive, final examination for recruit officers, GAO reports that the official position of the department is that such an examination "is not necessary." GAO is incorrect; that is not our policy. Comprehensive examinations were developed, indiscriminately administered, and then discontinued without sanction from the Chief of Police. Pending further evaluation, the department has not determined whether these examinations are necessary.

APPENDIX II: How many recruit termination recommendations have been disapproved by officials above the Director of Training level?

Again, as I have previously noted in other areas involved in recruit training, improvement is needed in the documentation associated with the termination of recruit officers. Although there were five termination recommendations disapproved by the former Chief of Police in September 1988, as was noted, there have been no recommendations for academic terminations disapproved since that time.

In one case last fall, the Administrative Services Officer disapproved a termination recommendation based on physical standards (running a given distance within a specified time period). Upon further review of the basis for the standard, the Director of Training withdrew the recommendation.

APPENDIX III: How does the Police Academy select and train its instructors?

The summary provided in the GAO report accurately reflects the selection and training of Police Academy instructors. I would only note that this process is patterned after the system used by the F.B.I. in its training of new instructors.

APPENDIX IV: How could the Metropolitan Police Department proceed to acquire accreditation?

The GAO report accurately outlines one way in which a municipal police agency might acquire accreditation; that is, through a process under the auspices of the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). The GAO report outlines the CALEA process correctly; however, I disagree that this is the only approach to the matter.

CALEA was established in 1979 and involves documentation of approximately 900 standards which cover virtually every aspect of a police department's operation. It is but one of a number of programs that arose from the movement to improve the professionalism of police officers throughout this country. Other programs include an increased emphasis on higher education, both for current employees and future employees; police officer standards and training (POST) certification for individual officers; higher standards of police conduct; and higher entry-level standards.

There are approximately 17,000 police agencies nationwide; most of these police agencies are staffed with fewer than 100 employees. Departments of that size have difficulty providing a full range of police service to their communities. Additionally, these departments traditionally have had great difficulty in developing meaningful written policies and procedures to guide their employees. These difficulties experienced by very small police agencies are generally not shared by large municipal police departments; consequently, the CALEA accreditation process is much more beneficial to these very small agencies than to a large municipal police department.

Despite a strong lobbying effort by CALEA, there is considerable disagreement within the law enforcement community -- especially among large municipal departments -- concerning its efficacy. While small police departments, in need of significant improvement of their written policies and procedures, have become involved in the CALEA accreditation process, few major city departments have taken this approach. (Houston and Chicago are the only notable exceptions, as far as I know.)

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CALEA's philosophical approach appears to be that by improving a department's written policies and procedures, its management can be improved. This is illustrated by the way in which CALEA accredits a police department. The first cycle of accreditation only determines whether the department has adequate written procedures to meet CALEA standards. It is not until the second cycle that the implementation of written procedures is assessed in terms of the way in which the department actually operates.

In spite of the problems which have been outlined with documentation of our recruit training program, this department has an extensive policies and procedures manual, which we call our "General Orders." My concern about our policies and procedures is not documentation, in most instances; that we have in volumes. My concern relates to the degree to which our sworn members are cognizant of our procedures and follow them in their application in "street" situations. We need to improve the application of our policies and procedures; CALEA would not assist us in the measurement of that process for many years.

The GAO report outlines visits to three police agencies which have sought CALEA accreditation. Representatives from these departments cited three benefits: (1) deterrence from litigation against the police department, (2) containment of liability insurance costs, and (3) improved department management resulting from documentation of all policies and procedures.

While these may have been benefits to those departments, I do not feel that they will benefit this department: (1) much of the litigation against this department arises from allegations that established policies and procedures were not followed; (2) this police department is not privately insured; and (3) our management problems in this area relate to the application of established policies and procedures, not their absence.

CALEA was designed to improve policies and procedures for police departments with significant deficits in these areas. It is a labor-intensive undertaking, and most police departments must identify a cadre of staff to devote to the process. Considered in the context of all of the department's efforts to develop a Community Empowerment Policing model designed to address the specific needs of this community, to stem the tide of drugs and violence, to improve the quality of our staff and management, and to ensure the delivery of a high-quality basic police service, undergoing the CALEA accreditation process is not in the best interest of this department or the community it serves. Finally, I should note that CALEA (as was noted in the GAO report) will not examine our recruit training function in isolation -- the apparent focus of the GAO report.

As was outlined, CALEA is but one of several movements to improve police professionalism. There are other ways in which the quality of the department and its members can be improved, and I intend to pursue several initiatives in this regard:

(1) Seek to establish a District of Columbia Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) certification program which would be modeled after other state-level POST programs (such as in California). Rather than focusing on the agency, a POST program focuses on the individual officer to ensure that the officer has the requisite level of training, skills, and knowledge. Such a program will be developed in conjunction with local universities and/or the Consortium of Universities. Additionally, I intend to explore a regional POST certification program in conjunction with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

(2) Seek out professional organizations that offer certification in specific, specialized skills (such as recruit training instruction) so that members can become certified in specialized areas.

(3) Seek an agreement with a local university to grant college credit for completion of the Police Academy. For those without a college degree, this would encourage recruit officers to pursue a college degree.

(4) Seek to improve entry-level standards. As I should outline later in these comments, the Test Development Office will explore this issue.

(5) Seek to improve the education level of current employees, especially new employees. The skills and insights associated with a college education are increasingly important, especially for future police managers, as the environment in which police operate becomes more complex.

Initiatives in Recruit Training

While the department has made improvements in our recruit training program in recent years, there are several areas which we are currently giving significant attention:

(1) The previous discretion of the Director of Training to change the recruit training curriculum has be modified; such changes now require concurrence by the Administrative Services Officer and approval by the Chief of Police.

(2) Changes in the recruit training curriculum are being better documented, as is the case with personnel actions taken during the recruit training process.

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(3) The policies and procedures for recruit training are in the process of being included in our General Order system.

(4) An effort is being made to identify instructors for the Police Academy who have a formal college background.

(5) A laser disk video system is going to be tested for use in recruit training. By way of example, recruit officers will watch a "shoot, don't shoot" scenario unfold on a monitor and then answer questions concerning what was seen. This system will also be used for in-service training.

(6) A microcomputer network has been ordered which will permit the Training Academy to automate the entire training operation. Many functions that are currently performed manually, such as records management and test administration, will be automated.

In addition to these endeavors, a Test Development Office is being created. This office will be staffed by individuals with advanced degrees who are highly skilled and experienced in measurement and statistics, program evaluation, and educational training and research. The staff will include a psychometrician.

The primary focus of this office will be to validate and integrate the department's training and evaluation systems. The police entry-level examination and entry-level standards will be evaluated to identify the degree to which they predict success in recruit training, later success and tenure in the field, and ultimate success in the department's career ladder. Similarly, the office will validate the recruit officer academic curriculum and physical skills training, as well as determining the degree to which they predict later success on the department. This office will also be responsible for development and administration of the promotional process and other selection procedures, such as the selection of Grade One Detectives.

I have taken affirmative steps to achieve these improvements, and will forward a report within 60 days concerning our progress in this area. Additionally, I am taking steps to improve our in-service training for officers, and supervisory and management training for officials.

Isaac Fulwood, Jr.

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